



Home Office

Office for Security and Counter Terrorism

SAFEGUARDING ONLINE EXPLAINING THE RISK POSED BY VIOLENT EXTREMISM



INTRODUCTION

The internet is a source of much that is positive. It offers unprecedented opportunities for global information exchange, communication, networking and education. Alongside these benefits however, there are risks, often reflecting those in the offline world. The offline risks of terrorism and violent extremism are well-known, and these are mirrored online. Terrorists and violent extremists exploit the internet for both operational purposes and as a tool for radicalisation and recruitment. This represents a serious risk to vulnerable individuals using the internet.

The purpose of this document is to raise awareness of these issues and provide practical guidance to those with responsibility for vulnerable individuals to protect them from the threats posed by violent extremism on the internet.

BACKGROUND

Violent extremists are using the internet to great effect. It has become a key means of influencing and training would-be terrorists, as the case studies demonstrate. Huge numbers of videos, speeches, audio statements and chat forums exist on the internet designed to spread distorted interpretations of religion and world events, to encourage vulnerable members of society to engage in terrorism (see box 1). A 2006 study into UK children's online behaviour¹ indicated that 22% of 9-19 year old daily and weekly internet users have *accidentally* ended up on a site with violent or gruesome pictures, while 9% have found a site hostile or hateful to a group of people. Individuals *actively* seeking such material are able to find it with ease.

The threat posed by violent extremist and terrorist material on the internet goes beyond radicalisation, as demonstrated by the case of David Copeland (see box 2). Online bomb-making manuals and instructions are prolific, potentially enabling extremists to prepare terrorist operations without the need for offline training camps or contact with trained specialists.



CASE STUDY 1: HAMAAD MUNSHI

Hamaad Munshi, of Dewsbury, was convicted in September 2008 of possessing materials that were likely to be used in acts of terrorism. Munshi, aged 16 when arrested, researched bomb-making instructions and was a member of a British online extremist group who shared Islamist extremist videos and discussed plans to fight overseas. Following the trial, Munshi's grandfather stated, "This case demonstrates how a young, impressionable teenager can be groomed so easily through the internet to associate with those whose views run contrary to true Muslim beliefs and values". Munshi was sentenced to two years in a Young Offenders' Institute.

¹ UK Children Go Online (See www.lse.ac.uk/collections/children-go-online/)

The case of Nicky Reilly (see box 3) highlights the special psychological factors associated with internet use: relationships formed and developed online can be very strong, while what people do online as a solitary activity can feed feelings of belonging to something bigger and better than themselves alone. Individuals are not always well enough equipped to challenge what they read online; this may be exacerbated in forums or chat rooms where users hold similar views and extreme views can go unchallenged.

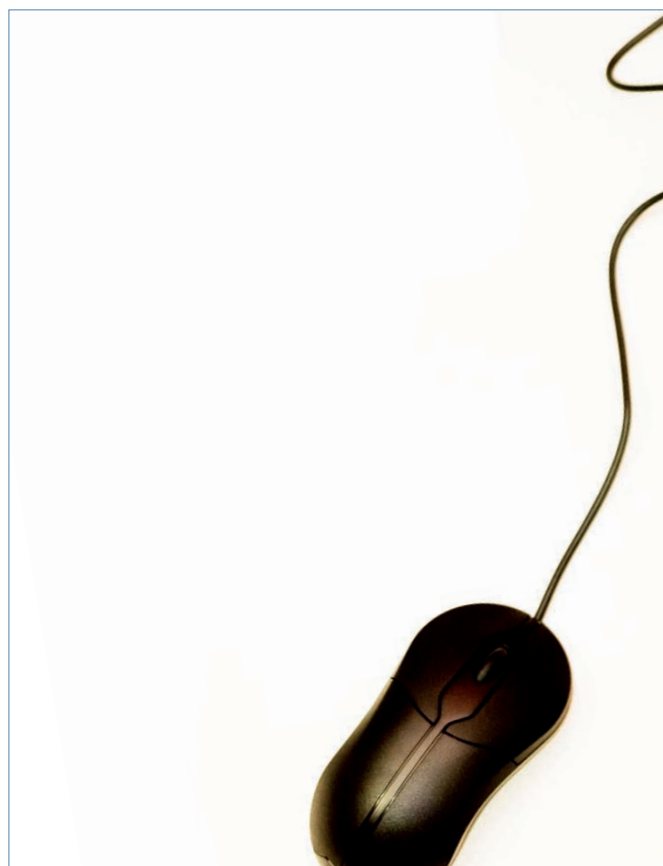
LEGAL ISSUES

While the legislative frameworks surrounding terrorism-related and extreme material on the internet are significantly different from that surrounding child abuse imagery, it must be understood that certain online activities in relation to these types of material may constitute criminal offences.

The Terrorism Acts 2000 and 2006 make it an offence to collect, make or possess records of information (including electronic records) likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism. This would include, for example, bomb-making or explosives manuals, attack planning guidance and information about potential targets. The Terrorism Act 2006 also makes it an offence to publish or distribute material which encourages individuals to commit, prepare or instigate acts of terrorism. This could be direct encouragement or indirect encouragement, in the form of glorification of terrorism.

The Public Order Act 1986 and Racial & Religious Hatred Act 2006 make it an offence to possess, publish or distribute material which is threatening, where the intention is to stir up religious or racial hatred. It should be noted that a religious group may also be defined as a group lacking religious belief.

Please refer to the fully-worded acts for a more detailed description of offences, defences and sentences. These can be found at <http://www.statutelaw.gov.uk/Home.aspx>.



CASE STUDY 2: DAVID COPELAND

David Copeland, known colloquially as the “London nail bomber”, was convicted in 2000 for his bombing campaign against ethnic minorities and homosexuals in the Brixton, Brick Lane and Soho areas of London. Three people were killed and over a hundred injured during the three attacks in April 1999. During the trial it was revealed that Copeland had downloaded racist and antisemitic literature from extreme right-wing Christian groups in America, as well as instructions on how to make bombs. Copeland acted alone – a feat made possible at least in part due to the ideological and instructional material he was able to access on the internet.

EXAMPLES OF INAPPROPRIATE VIOLENT EXTREMIST CONTENT

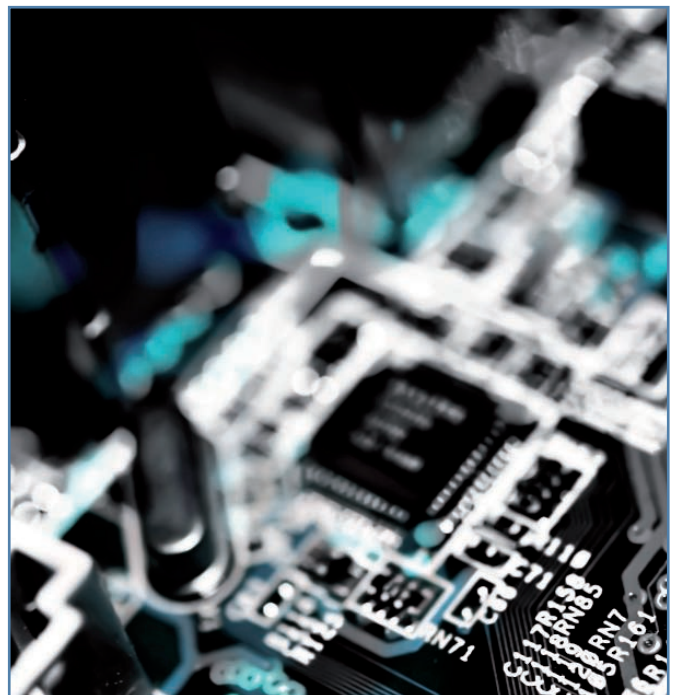
Examples of violent extremist content that are likely to be considered inappropriate and may also be illegal fall into two broad categories. These are:

- Materials likely to be useful in preparing, instigating or conducting an act of terrorism. This would include, for example, bomb-making instructions, explosives manuals, explanations of how to manufacture poisons and weaponry, and targeting information.
- Ideological materials inciting violence and/or hatred. This could include videos of fatal attacks against soldiers or beheadings with accompanying messages of glorification. Speeches and essays by individuals advocating racial or religious supremacy, actively stirring up hatred against other groups would also fall into this category, as would chat forums containing postings encouraging others to emulate the activities of terrorists or bigots.

HOW TO PROTECT VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS

It is recommended that parents and those with responsibility for vulnerable individuals follow standard guidance on online safety, such as that provided by ParentCentre (<http://www.parentcentre.gov.uk/usingcomputersandtheinternet/>) and The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (www.thinkuknow.co.uk). Additionally, it is recommended that individuals ask filtering companies about the protection their products offer against violent extremist and terrorist-related material in order to determine that they have adequate protection for their needs. Following consultation with industry and communities, a growing number of filtering and parental control software companies now choose to work with the Home Office to ensure their products provide an enhanced level of protection against material that promotes terrorism.

Schools and other educational establishments should continue to follow Becta's e-safety advice on dealing with unacceptable and illegal content, which can be



CASE STUDY 3: NICKY REILLY

Nicky Reilly, a twenty-two year old from Plymouth, received a life sentence in January 2009 having attempted to detonate an improvised explosive device at a restaurant in Exeter in May 2008. Reilly, who suffered from Asperger's Syndrome and had a mental age of 10, was a recluse who spent much of his time on the internet. During his trial it was revealed that Reilly was encouraged by violent extremists on internet chat rooms, who introduced him to Islamist extremist material, anti-West literature and attack planning material. Evidence indicated that Reilly watched hours of YouTube videos showing terrorist and insurgent attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as bomb-making instructions. The judge presiding over Reilly's trial commented that Reilly had been "seduced" by a cause he "wrongly and almost fatally interpreted and probably never understood".

found at www.becta.org.uk/safeguarding.php. Of particular interest will be Becta's advice on responding to incidents of attempts by staff and students to access inappropriate and illegal content (http://schools.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=is&catcode=ss_to_es_pp_pol_03 and http://schools.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=is&catcode=ss_to_es_pp_aup_03&rid=12002) Given the nature of the material, it is recommended that evidence of attempts to or actual access to terrorist and violent extremist material is treated seriously and the e-safety coordinator and/or local police officer is notified.

FURTHER INFORMATION

How schools can contribute to the prevention of violent extremism – DCSF Toolkit – <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/violentextremism/toolkitforschools/index.shtml>

How colleges can contribute to the prevention of violent extremism – DIUS Toolkit – http://www.dius.gov.uk/-/media/publications/1/17132_DIUS_Learning_Be_Safe

The cross-Government strategy for countering international terrorism (CONTEST) – http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-publications/publication-search/general/HO_Contest_strategy.pdf

Internet Watch Foundation – to report UK-based hate material – www.iwf.org.uk

Information about Home Office work to tackle hate crime – <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/hate-crime/>

UK Council for Child Internet Safety – <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/ukccis/>

Anti-Terrorist hotline – to report suspicious activity to the police – http://www.met.police.uk/so/at_hotline.htm